

# James Drew Bishop

Foreign correspondent who became deputy editor of *The Times* and the first chairman of the Oxford and Cambridge Club

*Times* foreign correspondent, features and deputy editor who later edited and published *The Illustrated London News*, was Chairman of National Heritage and helped establish the Museum of the Year Award.

James (Jim) Bishop, who died on 2 March 2017, worked for *The Times* for more than 25 years, but got his name into the paper only once. This was because, as the then Editor patiently explained to all his ambitious young journalists, the paper was far more important than those who worked for it. It was not until William Rees-Mogg became editor in 1965 that journalists were given by-lines.

Jim Bishop was born in Hampstead, the son of Frank Patrick (later Sir Patrick Bishop, MP for Harrow Central), and was educated at Haileybury College and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, where he read history. He clearly decided at a young age that his future was in journalism: he wrote his weekly letters from prep school in the form of a newspaper, with headlines about the school's sporting achievements and incorporating made-up advertisements.

When he left Haileybury, he completed his National Service as a Second Lieutenant in the Artillery Regiment. Rather than being sent to the Far East, as he had hoped, he was posted to bitterly cold barracks in Edinburgh; on the plus side, however, one of his jobs was to buy the wine for the mess, which proved to be the beginning of his love of fine wine.

In the long vacations from university he worked in the editorial department of the daily evening newspaper, the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*. On coming down from Cambridge he joined the editorial staff, but worked there for only a few months before joining *The Times*.

He worked initially as a trainee in the supplements department before moving to the paper's sub-editorial team and then,



under the guidance of Oliver Woods, to edit the paper's quarterly Colonies Review. His experience there occasionally led to the writing of the main paper's leading article and to work as a foreign correspondent. Under both Woods and editor William Haley he was schooled in the value of rigorous journalistic integrity and accurate reporting, lessons he carried with him and practised throughout his career. In fact Woods' wife once described him as "the best editor *The Times* never had".

His assignments took him to many trouble spots around the world, including Cyprus, where the Governor arranged for a car – armed with a single revolver – to drive him to the Troodos mountains to interview rebel chief, Colonel Grivas; the Congo, where he had to cross a crocodile-infested river to file his copy; and Beirut, where he came under fire and filed the memorable line, "your correspondent leopard-crawled to safety". It was while he was in Beirut in 1963 that he entered a bar and was surprised to see that one of its regulars was absent. The regular was Kim Philby – then Middle East correspondent for *The Observer* and *The Economist* – who, as it later transpired, had been spirited from Beirut to Moscow by the KGB.

It was in 1960, as the correspondent covering Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's

"Winds of Change" tour of Africa, that he came to appreciate the value of reporting only exactly what he had seen. In Nyasaland, a peaceful demonstration by Africans outside the hotel where Macmillan was being given lunch was reported as a riot by some of the British correspondents. Subsequent stories in the British popular press caused an outcry in London: questions were asked in the House of Commons and an inquiry was set up, with the result that in the following year the correspondents concerned were flown back to Blantyre to give evidence before Lord Justice Southworth. His report concluded that Bishop's account in *The Times* seemed to be the most accurate – and this got Bishop his name into the paper.

In the following year he was appointed correspondent in New York, where his brief included all the US outside Washington, as well as the whole of South America. Most of Jim's travels in South and Central America were to Cuba, where he interviewed both Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. His first trip was in a virtually empty Pan American jumbo jet, which on its return was jam-packed with Cubans – described by Fidel Castro as *gusanos* (worms) – escaping empty-handed to Miami. Subsequently the only way in to Cuba was through Mexico, and it was on his way there via Mexico City in 1963 that he learnt of the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas. When he arrived at the airport he noted that there was a flight to Dallas leaving at about the same time as his flight to Havana, and contacted Washington to ask whether he should go there rather than to Cuba. Since the President's body was already being flown back to Washington, the advice was that he should proceed to Havana to find out whether Cuba had been involved in the assassination. Although he reported that he found no evidence of this, he got into trouble with the Cuban authorities who wanted to know how his reports, published in *The Times* and picked up by the *New York Times*, had not been censored. He was advised to leave, which he did. He said he always regretted obeying the instructions to

continue to Cuba rather than detouring to Dallas, where the real story was unfolding.

In 1964 he was appointed Foreign News Editor of *The Times*, a post he held until 1966 when work began on preparing the paper to put news on the front page. He was then appointed the paper's first Features Editor and created its additional Saturday edition. When *The Times* published an eight-page supplement in August 1969 to commemorate Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon, he decided to print the first and last pages in colour: one of the first, if not the first, occasions that colour printing was used in a daily newspaper.

In 1966, *The Times* had been acquired by Thomson Newspapers, which also owned *The Illustrated London News* and in 1970 Jim, by then Deputy Editor of *The Times*, was "lent" to the ILN as Editor. He restored the magazine's fortunes by re-launching the large-format weekly as a smaller-format monthly news publication. He also expanded the ILN's publishing interests and profitability by producing various programmes, one-off publications and periodicals, and in 1973 readily agreed for the ILN to sponsor the Museum of the Year Award (now the Art Fund Prize Museum of the Year Award). When the ILN was sold to Sea Containers in 1985, he continued as Editor, then Managing Editor until 1987 and, finally, as Editor-in-Chief of Illustrated London News Publications until he retired in 1994.

In addition to his main professional engagements, Jim gave his time tirelessly to various other projects. He was instrumental in the amalgamation of two Oxbridge University Clubs (both of which faced financial disaster) into the Oxford and Cambridge Club and became its first chairman in 1972. He was a contributor to *The Annual Register* from 1950 to 1988 and a member of its advisory board from 1970; he was a member of the D notice committee, which oversaw government requests not to publish sensitive information for reasons of national security; he was Chair of the Association of British Editors, from 1987

to 1996, of the Editorial Board of *Natural World*, from 1981 to 1997, and of *National Heritage* from 1998. In addition, he wrote *A Social History of Edwardian Britain*, 1977; *Social History of the First World War*, 1982; *The Story of The Times* (with Oliver Woods), 1983; *The Sedgwick Story*, 1998; and edited *The Illustrated Counties of England*, 1985. In his later years he wrote travel articles – mainly on cruising, for the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Away from his professional life, he was full of warmth and humour, was generous with his time and advice, and was always prepared to help young journalists and publishers. He was also prepared to employ women and to give them responsibility – an uncommon trait in the 1960s. He loved a party, was first on the dance floor, and would enliven social occasions with his wit, sense of fun and by breaking into song (he had a fine, if untrained, tenor voice and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of songs from the music hall, radio shows and musicals).

Jim met his wife Brenda Pearson, who was studying singing at Dartington Hall, at a New Year's Eve party in 1953. Five years later he heard her singing on the radio, contacted her and invited her to dinner. They married in 1959.

He is survived, and will be sadly missed, by Brenda, his two sons Edward and William, their wives Sarah and Catherine, grandchildren Charlotte, Sam and Helena, and by his extended family and many friends.

**James Bishop, journalist, was born on 18 June 1929 and died on 2 March 2017, aged 87.**

**by Adrienne LeMan**

In 1973, when National Heritage launched *The Museum of the Year Awards*, *The Illustrated London News* was an ideal sponsor, as its readership interest was staunchly rooted in the arts and heritage. With James's innovative flair coupled with John Letts' tenacious drive, the annual awards ceremony, with the top prize winner receiving Henry Moore's *Moon Head* trophy, became the "oscar" in the heritage world.

When John Letts stepped down as Chairman of National Heritage after nearly three decades, James Bishop took over and brought his journalistic talent and innovative flair, initiating the first Museums Survey and *Museum News*. Photo courtesy Brenda Bishop